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SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE PASS TO IIP/S/SV SAM WUNDER
FSI FOR DAVID GALINDO
MAPUTO FOR KRISTIN KANE
LUANDA FOR ABBY DRESSEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [KPAO](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: SOFT POWER GOLD: PRESIDENT OBAMA INSPIRES AFRO-BRAZILIANS
IN SAO PAULO

REF:

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) Summary: Sao Paulo's leading Afro-Brazilians organized a packed (300-plus person) dinner event attended by the community's leading figures, from celebrities to successful business persons, to celebrate President Barack Obama's inauguration on January 20. The atmosphere was euphoric. The event's main organizer invited Poloff to give the keynote, an illustrative PowerPoint presentation that combined U.S. History with a detailed biography of the President, showing how a multicultural society has produced a multicultural President. The presentation was well received and post envisions using it, and other materials, as part of a wider outreach effort to introduce the new Administration and President Obama to other segments of Brazilian society. In addition, this presentation gives us yet another way in which to build upon the on-going dialogue on race that is an integral part of the Brazil-U.S. Joint Action Plan Against Racism. Where Brazil is concerned, the new President's story, combined with American History, is soft power gold. End Summary.

Sao Paulo's Afro-Brazilians Celebrate Obama

¶2. (U) Sao Paulo's Afro-Brazilian leaders organized a packed formal dinner held at a downtown mansion to recognize the U.S. President's inauguration on January 20. The celebration was organized by RACA ("Race") Magazine, a publication aimed at Afro-Brazilian professionals; Grupo Integracao (Integration Group), an Afro-Brazilian NGO; and Pestana Art and Publications (a business run by Afro-Brazilian artist and Consulate contact Mauricio Pestana). Pestana took the lead in putting together the event. He told Poloffs that when he started work on the project just one week before, he had planned for 30-40 persons, but the gathering quickly mushroomed into something much bigger. By the time it was held, the event had become a sold-out gala for over 300 persons.

A Wide-Ranging Crowd: From Community Leaders...

¶3. (U) The crowd was made up for the most part of various elements of the commercial, cultural and political leadership of Sao Paulo's Afro-Brazilian community, including some who flew in from Brasilia

to participate. Among luminaries present were entertainment personalities (Brazilian TV star Adriana Lessa), politicians (including the third largest vote-getter in the recent Sao Paulo municipal elections, Netino de Paula, who has been a singer and TV star and is now a city councilman for the PCdoB, the Brazilian Communist Party), and a host of professional, government and business persons. The group's impressive credentials made clear that Sao Paulo's Afro-Brazilian community has developed a leadership with strong representation in a wide variety of key sectors.

...To Common Folk

¶4. (U) While the Afro-Brazilian event took place in luxurious circumstances, it was not an exclusive event. Prior radio announcements had made the Afro-Brazilian public aware of the gathering and a distinct minority who attended were not the rich and the famous, but rather working folks and elderly people, including a bus driver and two grandmothers. In many ways, these participants proved to be the most revealing sources in conversations with Consulate Officers.

Crowd Comments: "I'm Here to Celebrate My Son"

¶5. (SBU) The Afro-Brazilians proved to be an excellent source for sampling attitudes about the U.S. and about Afro-Brazilians' perception of their social position. While the atmosphere was almost uniformly euphoric, several comments stood out for their insights:

--President Obama's election inspired many participants to ask when Brazil might follow the U.S. in electing an Afro-descended

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President. One refrain heard frequently was: "The U.S. has far fewer Afro-descendants than Brazil, where we are fifty percent of the population. When will we have our Obama?"

--Communist Party City Council member Netinho de Paula attempted to answer this question in his remarks. He spoke positively of both Obama and the U.S. public, reminding the crowd that Obama's victory, while that of an African American, was only made possible by the President's ability to reach out to white voters. (Comment: De Paula appeared to be saying that Afro-Brazilians need to broaden their leadership style to prosper politically. PCdoB Councilman De Paula is a proven vote-getter with evident public speaking skills and a possible high profile future role in politics. End Comment.)

--Antonia, a retired secretary in her 70s, told Conoff, "I am here to celebrate my son."

--Many felt bolstered in their confidence that an Afro-Brazilian will one day become President of Brazil. Several expressed confidence that U.S.-Brazilian relations would prosper under the Obama Presidency.

Joy Tempered by Internal Divisions

¶6. (SBU) Despite the joy for Obama, participants noted latent divisions among Afro-Brazilians.

--When Poloff mentioned to Mauricio Pestana that he would work with the Afro-Brazilians to develop courses on Afro-American History for a university like Universidade da Cidadania Zumbi dos Palmares, an Afro-inspired university here in Sao Paulo, Pestana warned Poloff not to cite that university, since some in the crowd believed its leadership was too closed. (Note: Consulate works closely with Zumbi dos Palmares, which hosted BSC visitors related to the Brazil-U.S. Joint Action Plan Against Racism last September. We have not had problems with the school's operating style. End Note.)

--A bus driver who attended told Conoff that it would take a long time for Afro-Brazilians to elect one of their own President because, "We don't support each other." One Senhora Concecao complained that even when Afro-Brazilians elect one of their own,

people like Celso Pitta and Benedita da Silva, the elected leaders often do not hold up their end of the bargain. (Note: Pitta was the first Afro-Brazilian Mayor of Sao Paulo and da Silva was the first Afro-Brazilian Senator. Pitta was forced to resign due to a corruption scandal and da Silva has also been embroiled in alleged ethical difficulties. End Note.)

Obama Presentation

¶7. (U) Poloff delivered a PowerPoint presentation that combined a review of the United States emergence as an ever-more multicultural society, starting with the lamentable period of slavery in the US through the Civil Rights movement and up to the election of President Obama. Based in part on a close reading of President Obama's autobiography, "Dreams of My Father", the talk showcased how the diversity of the President's background prepared him to lead a diverse nation. The crowd reacted positively to the presentation, which Consulate had road-tested in December. Those who heard the talk praised it and recommended it for civil society groups and for universities and schools once the academic year begins again in February.

Comment: Soft Power Gold for a Key Group

¶8. (SBU) President Obama's story, when woven into the larger story of race relations and emerging diversity in the U.S., becomes soft power gold for a multiethnic, developing country like Brazil, which is struggling with issues of social inclusion. Post is continuing to refine its outreach strategy and presentations and plans to deploy this presentation in schools, binational centers, and civil

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society. Particularly now, during the presidential honeymoon period, we have a unique window of opportunity to widen contacts with a positive message about democracy, diversity and change, one that, so far, has road-tested well. In addition, the President's story naturally lends itself to furthering our work on the Brazil-U.S. Joint Action Plan Against Racism.

¶9. (SBU) Sao Paulo's Afro-Brazilian community demonstrates both dynamism and division. On the one hand, the January 20 gathering showed how quickly the community could pull together a major event, how prosperous and well-known some of its leaders have become, and how committed they were to keeping the door open to participation by less privileged Afro-Brazilians. On the other, Brazil's Afro-Brazilians have difficulty developing spokespersons or institutions that enjoy across-the-board support. City Council member Netinho de Paula emphasized how President Obama's example might apply to this challenge when he reminded the audience that it was precisely candidate Obama's ability to reach beyond African-Americans that enabled his political success.

¶10. (U) This cable was coordinated/cleared by Embassy Brasilia.

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